

Were major literary projects run by hidden nobility?

Case study: Fran Saleški Finžgar, Slovenian writer



First published April 2, 2023

Fran Saleški Finžgar (1871-1962) is known as one of the greatest Slovenian authors who wrote many famous novels and plays. But in his time, Finžgar was an important personality not only in literature, but also in other fields, and he was closely connected to many influential people. For example, he collaborated on many projects in the field of architecture with the famous architect Jože Plešnik, and was very close with Izidor Cankar and his cousin Ivan Cankar, two of the most influential people of the time, with Ivan being labeled as the greatest Slovenian writer of all time. Because of his important connections, Finžgar is described as a so-called "star" among the literati of his time.

But as we will see below, we don't really know the true story of F. S. Finžgar, because his story, as presented to us by official history, is false. How did I learn that? By coincidence I got ahold of a recent biography called *F. S. Finžgar: Faith in beauty, truth and justice* (*F. S. Finžgar: vera v lepoto, resnico in pravico*, Glavan & Bogataj, 2021). I didn't expect to see anything unusual in the book and wasn't even seriously looking for anomalies. Still I couldn't help but notice that the book is filled with (badly) forged photos and documents. My subsequent discoveries amazed me – already in the first Slovenian case that I studied, the script follows the examples described by Miles to the letter. It turned out that the word "truth" in the title of the book is a very bold lie!

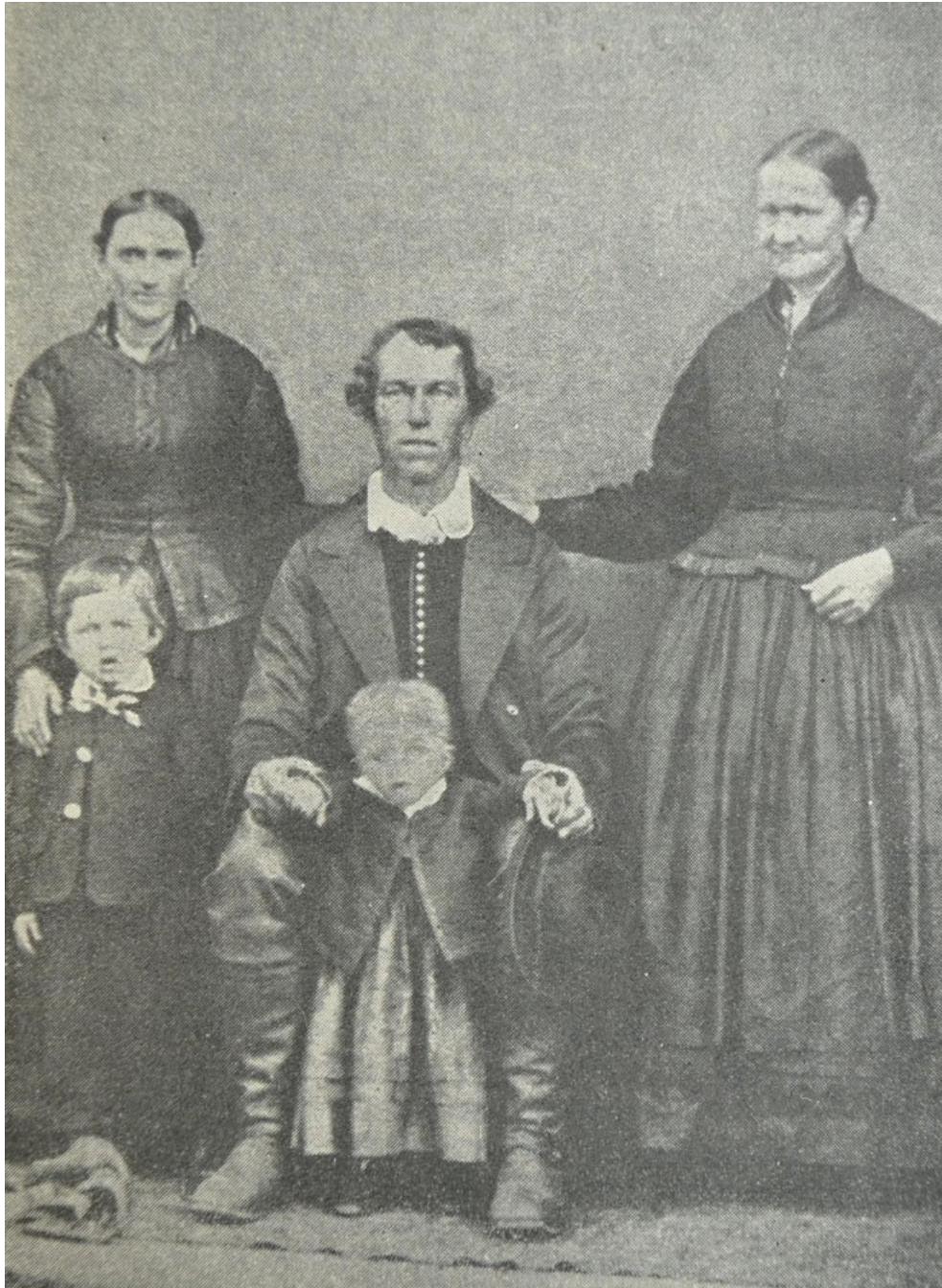
F. S. Finžgar is said to have been born to poor cottagers (tailors and weavers, both traditional Jewish occupations according to Miles) in a small town Doslave. As a talented writer and priest he is supposed to have quickly risen to the top of the intellectual society. Since Miles shows that the story of someone coming from a poor family and getting famous because of his talent is a standard lie, I paid attention to the anomalies in the writer's early years. I didn't have to search for a long time. I noticed that there are very few photos of young Finžgar with his supposed family, in fact I

could only find two such photos (on all other family photos he is missing). Let's look at the first such photo from the new biography:



Fran is said to be the young boy in the front, standing between his father's legs, and his brother Janez is said to be the boy standing on the left. There are several strange things to note in this photo. First of all, why is a boy wearing a girl's skirt? I also noticed that the clothes are rather fancy and don't fit the story of the poor cottagers, and that especially Fran's face is unnaturally overexposed and therefore unrecognizable, indicating that the photo was tampered with.

The forgery of the photo becomes even clearer when we look at the same picture as presented in Finžgar's old autobiography from 1957 (*Leta mojega popotovanja*):



In this picture the situation is just the opposite – Fran's face is too dark compared to the others, and this is so obvious that we can say without the slightest doubt that his face was pasted into the photo. The face is also strangely blurred, in fact half of the face is smeared beyond recognition. It seems the forgers noticed that the forgery was too obvious in the old book and changed it for the new biography by making the face unnaturally light. To sum up, the original photo most likely shows a little girl and despite the obvious problem with the skirt, they want to convince us that this is young Fran.

Another problem with this photo is the fact that it is said to have been taken in 1872, when photography was in its infancy and was not easily available. How could the poor cottagers afford such photography?

Let's look at the second photo of Finžgar with his family in the new biography:



He is supposed to be top left. It seems fake at first glance, but a light vignette effect has been added to the edges of the photo so the details are not visible. But I found a definite confirmation. An enlarged section of this "photo" without any added effect is available on the web:



It is clearly visible here that Fran's face was subsequently pasted onto the photo. It's much grainier than his clothes, and it's also a completely different shade of gray. The mother's face below has the same problems. We can also see that the mother's face and hair looks completely different in the same picture as shown in the old autobiography:



And where is Fran's hand? It should be on the shoulder of his mother, but it mysteriously disappears in this version of the photo. In order to hide all these issues, the forgers added a light vignette effect to the photo for the new book. However, for some reason they posted a section of the original "photo" in a very unusual place on the internet ... but more about that later.

In addition to the obvious problems there are also minor anomalies. The people in the photo are again well-dressed and the brother's wife Marija, sitting in the foreground, is holding a child (supposedly a son named Janez) in her arms. However, in Finžgar's biography it is written that his brother had no children.

OK, now we had a look at the family photos that include Fran; what about other family photos? It turns out these are also fakes. Let's start with the most obvious fake, a photo of the family from the old autobiography (try to spot the issues without reading below):



This photo, supposedly from 1915, is so obviously fake that it was "hidden" towards the end of the autobiography book, and in the new biography it was not published at all (in the 1950s it was much more difficult to fake a photo than it is today). Let's look at the face of brother's wife Marija standing on the left. The face is blurred while the other faces are in focus, indicating that it was subsequently pasted onto the photo. It is also well lit from the left side, while her husband's face above is shaded on the left side. People are unnaturally squeezed in front of a background where there is no room for such a large group. And look at the "maid Reza" on the right side of the photo – how she can float in the air and how desperately fake her shadow is! To top it off, her face is much darker than the faces of others. And the boy in the middle of the photo wearing a tie is supposed to be "shepherd Mirko", an important member of the household, no doubt.

Let's look at more photos of the family that can only be found in the new biography:





These photos look like they weren't tampered with, but there is still something very wrong with them. They are supposed to have been taken before the year 1900, at a time when photographs still looked something like this:



The photos of Finžgar's family look different, more modern, with distinct details, and were likely taken many decades later when the technology was already adequately developed. Also, look at the photo of the family above, where the father is holding a shovel and the mother a butter churn – does anyone really believe that in 1892 a not-so-wealthy family was posing like this in the yard while doing dirty work? These are obviously actors posing as family, and Fran is of course absent because at the time these pictures were taken, he was already quite old and couldn't pose as a young guy.

Then there is the photo below which supposedly shows Finžgar's grandfather Jože Ažman on the left, brother Janez Finžgar in the middle and cousin Jože Zupan on the right:



There is again the obvious problem of people sitting on luxurious chairs next to a luxurious table. Where did poor people get such fancy furniture? Could they really afford to take such photos before 1885, when this picture was supposedly taken?

We can see that the story has many holes even if we only focus on the family photos. Are there any other indications that the story of Finžgar's background is untrue? Fran's brother Janez Finžgar is said to have later become a shop owner in Breznica. For a while he was also a fire department chief and even a mayor. Despite this, Janez is mentioned suspiciously little in the books, nor can one find anything relevant for the name "Janez Finžgar" online.

To make sure whether Fran's brother Janez Finžgar and other members of the family were real people, I went to a graveyard in Breznica, close to Finžgar's birthplace where many of them should have been buried. Before going there I found the supposed [Finžgar family tree](#) with exact dates of births and deaths that match the dates in the biographies. This visit to the graveyard was a definite confirmation that the whole story, including the family tree, is made up – there is a grave there that matches the birth and death dates of Janez and his wife Marija, however, their last name was not Finžgar, but Dolenc! To top it off, these people had two children, while Janez and Marija supposedly didn't have any children.

Here is a photo of the grave:



Besides this one grave, I couldn't find a single relevant grave, even though there are many supposed family members mentioned in Finžgar's biographies who should've been buried there.

Let's look at another photo from the new biography:



This picture supposedly shows the gathering for the initiation of priest Alojzij Zupan, the writer's little nephew, in Bled in 1916. Finžgar is in the first row second from the left. But the “photo” is a terrible fake. People are glued to the background – eight rows of people are supposed to be standing in an area a couple of meters distance from the building, and there is even a tree squeezed in between! The wooden building behind looks huge compared to the height of the people standing in the last row. In the third row (behind the boy looking like a sailor in the middle of the photo) we can see elderly women with headscarves who look 2 meters tall. It's amazing what they dare to post as real photos, or maybe they think that no one really reads these biographies? **Yes, the perspective is all wrong.**

And as if the whole thing is not yet bizarre enough, I noticed a photo in the birth-house-turned-museum of Slovenia's greatest poet France Prešeren that shows three people from the photo above, with these three people being presented to us as completely different people than the people claimed to be in the Finžgar photos! Let's look at these people on a close-up from the photo above:



We are told that the person on the left is Finžgar's cousin Jože Zupan (also pictured on the photo above with the grandfather Ažman and luxurious furniture), the younger guy in the middle his little nephew Alojzij Zupan, and the person on the right another cousin Ignacij Fertin.

In this photo from the new biography we can see Finžgar's cousins Jože Zupan and Ignacij Fertin even better:



And now let's look at the photo from France Prešeren's museum showing the same people:



In the text under this photo it is claimed that the photo shows (from the left) priest Ivan Svetina, prelate Tomo Zupan, young Anton Vovk and our ol' pal F. S. Finžgar. The photo was taken in 1923 during Anton Vovk's initiation into a priest. Anton Vovk is known as Prešeren's grandnephew who later became an archbishop. Just a quick glance at photos online reveals to us that the two guys on the left are not Ivan Svetina and Tomo Zupan, since they don't look even remotely similar to them. The only people who are correctly labeled here are Anton Vovk and F. S. Finžgar.

It now becomes clear that on the ridiculous group photo above we are not looking at Finžgar's relative Alojzij Zupan, but at Prešeren's relative Anton Vovk. Who knows if the two older guys are really Ignacij Fertin and Jože Zupan and how they are connected to Finžgar and/or Prešeren. What we can assume with great probability is some kind of a connection between Finžgar and Prešeren, in the sense that perhaps the same people are standing behind the stories (and photos) of the two. It is a curious fact that Finžgar was running the project of renovating Prešeren's birth house and changing it into a museum. Prešeren is said to have been a distant relative of his, but this still doesn't explain adequately why Finžgar was given this important task.

Another serious anomaly appears in the story about Finžgar's initiation into priesthood in 1894. In biographies there are different places listed as the place where this initiation took place – the correct place, Brezje, is mentioned in the old autobiography, while both Breznica and Brezje are mentioned in the new book. Apparently the authors of the new book mixed up the two places because of similar names and even wrote the wrong place (Breznica) on the fake "memorial card":



In the new book we can also find a fake photo of Finžgar's priesthood in the town Želimlje:



The woman in the back looks like a midget – much too small in comparison to the height of the door that are really not very tall. The background is way too exposed compared to the rest. And what's up with the neck of the woman on the left? Someone is giving us a clue with the dog's eyes, aka god's eyes.

Let's look at two more photos, taken in 1896 when Finžgar was 25. On the left photo he is allegedly with a friend from his youth called Alojzij Grom, and on the right photo he is with a poet and writer Engelbert Gangl. But Alojzij Grom supposedly died in July 1892, so at the time the photos were taken, he should've already been dead for 4 years. So who is Finžgar with in this photo? It certainly looks like a wealthy, well-dressed person. Also Finžgar with a cigar doesn't exactly look like a simple guy who was still herding goats a few years earlier.



So it looks like the story of Finžgar's youth (and perhaps beyond) was completely made up. But why would one do such a thing? Maybe Finžgar had a past that for some reason they didn't want to reveal. For example, he could have been an illegitimate son of a very influential person, and indeed his descent from an important family would be only logical because in reality, poor people, even if talented, can not succeed like he did. Finžgar's works were heavily promoted from the very beginning. He studied at so-called Alojzijevis e (named after the Jesuit saint [Aloysius de Gonzaga](#), with another patron of the school being saint Francis de Sales) where many other influential people of the time, such as Dragotin Kette, Josip Jur i , Ivan Tav ar, Fran Levstik, Izidor Cankar, Anton Medved, Josip Stritar etc., were educated as well. This indicates that Alojzijevis e was not really “an institution for poor children”, as stated in Finžgar’s biography, but a school for the training of future important influencers. And indeed in old literature it is stated that also children of wealthy parents were accepted into this school. It seems likely that the “poor children” story was emphasized in order to raise funds for the institution.

But most likely a poor Slovenian background was assigned to Finžgar not because he was an illegitimate son, but in order for the masses to better identify with his writing. It would be difficult to present a writer of a noble foreign background as a person of great national pride.

The new biography reveals something even much more interesting. In it we can find a list of guests invited to Finžgar's initiation where the following is written:

II Sorodniki: 28

Odeni.	{	Oče	Fran Seraf.	-----	svilen pat
		Mati	Teruz.	-----	Marijo
		Brat	Janez evang.	-----	svilen
		Teča	Rezon	-----	svilen

Surprisingly his father's name ("o e" means "father" in Slovene) is written as "Fran Seraf." – with Seraf. short for Serafin. Was the father, supposedly a simple cottager going by the name of Franc Finžgar, really given a middle name Serafin? This name is not mentioned anywhere else in Finžgar's biographies. It is also not explained anywhere why Fran was given the middle name Saleški (Salesian) already at birth. We would expect to see such middle names among people of the upper class, not poor cottagers. (See Miles' [paper on Mussolini](#) for how Salesians are linked to the Jews.)

An online search for the name "Fran Serafin" leads us to Fran Serafin Vilhar Kalski (see picture below), the son of a nobleman Miroslav Vilhar of Kalec Castle, whose family was known for its engagement in culture and arts. We see him wearing decorations of King's Cross of the Order of St. Sava (first being two-headed eagle, second lined with two-headed eagles) and a Teutonic Cross.



You have to admit that F. S. Finžgar looks more similar to Fran Serafin than to the family in the pictures above. They have a very similar hairline. Birth year of Fran Serafin is 1852, so he was of just the right age to be the real Finžgar's father.

When I was looking for information about Fran Serafin Vilhar Kalski, I came across a website where his life is described shortly and several photos are shown. Imagine my surprise when [among these few photos](#) I found a photo of F. S. Finžgar (shown again below)! The photo is supposedly shown there because of surka, a type of vest that Finžgar is wearing on that photo; we learn that Fran Serafin was also known for wearing surkas.



So the person who supplied this website with personal photos of Fran Serafin Vilhar is also in possession of an original, not yet completely finalized fake of Finžgar's family photo. What a "coincidence"! And think about it – why would someone look for an example of surka in the archive of Finžgar's old photos?

But there is more. In the new biography we can also find the following card confirming Finžgar's enrollment in the Society of Slovenian novelists:



His name is written as Fran Ser. Finžgar, not Fran Sal. Finžgar as one would expect. Did someone mistakenly write down Fran's real name – Fran Serafin?

It is also interesting that Miroslav Vilhar, Fran Serafin's father, was involved in very similar things as later Finžgar; he was a well-known writer, poet, editor, publisher and politician. He established a perfect background for the creation of big literary projects. Even his views and the topics he wrote about were unusually similar to Finžgar's. For example, here is a description of Miroslav's song-play *Ivana of the Cave* (*Jamska Ivanka*):

[Miroslav Vilhar] drew on material from the German work (Anna von Göstig is set in a German castle, using German names), but he used Slavic names and added songs that sing about Slavism and freedom ... Characters with Slavic-sounding names appear: the cave knight Vladimir and his wife Ljudmila raise Bogomil, the son of his deceased friend, as his own, and daughter Ivanka ... The main idea of the work is the depiction of the Slavic spirit and the idea of the freedom of the nation (Turel 1963: 17), which is manifested in Slavic names and in some poems. A knight named Miroslav, living in Kalec, reminds of the author himself and of an unfortunate episode from the castle. Regardless of the historical background, Vilhar used every opportunity in the story to sing the praises of the Slavs and the homeland, thus inspiring the viewers who in that period still wanted their own, Slavic homeland (Turel 1963: 18).

Compare this to Finžgar's most famous novel *Under the Free Sun* that discusses the settlement of the Slavs on Balkan Peninsula with typical Slavic names when they still lived freely, not subjugated, and without a supreme leader. (It's crazy to think that the novel ends so that the Slavic hero Iztok falls in love with a woman from a Byzantine royal house, has children with her and their offspring continue the magnificent "Slavic" nation ... except that this Byzantine woman could have been of Jewish origin according to Miles, in which case her descendants matrilineally become Jewish as well!)

Miroslav Vilhar was best known for encouraging the Slovenian/Slavic national pride, suggesting to the people that it would be a good idea to free themselves from the German rule. But Miroslav had a problem, namely that he was likely not of a Slovenian (or Slavic) origin. Despite this not being mentioned anywhere, it seems likely that the Wilichers are descendants of the well-known Villiers noble family, as Wilicher simply sounds like a German variant of Villiers. Miroslav's true name was Friedrich Karl Wilicher and he is said to have written his first works in German, but then

deliberately started improving his Slovene at the age of 25 so that he could write in the language of the common people. He later even changed his name into the Slavic Miroslav Vilhar. This is described as unusual, since the language of nobility was German at the time and wealthy people were known to have little national pride; even worse, they often arrogantly mocked things like Slavic names. But it seems that some, like Miroslav, were beginning to realize that it's to their advantage to get common people on their side. [The Villiers link us to the Stuarts.](#)

Pictured below is the Wilicher/Vilhar family around 1870 (Miroslav should be the older guy in the back):



By reading about his family it is easy to get a feeling that making up stuff was not a foreign concept to the Vilhars. Miroslav's son Fran Serafin is said to have struggled financially; his family (shown above) supposedly could not afford to send him to a music school in Prague, but he got lucky and won the lottery. Very believable. Also, descriptions of Miroslav Vilhar are often so extremely flattering that they appear untrue; for example, he is said to have been "a man of too abundant achievements". He supposedly spent 6 weeks in prison in 1864 due to publishing stuff that was not favorable with Austrian authorities. As Miles usually points out, in reality he probably did not spend a day in jail. Just look at the photos allegedly taken during his jailtime shown below. It is hard to believe that such photos were taken as early as 1864, but they look like pure theater in any case. The person pictured doesn't even look like the guy supposed to be Miroslav on the photo above. Despite this, the photo on the right is published as Miroslav's main photo on Wikipedia!



Yes, both of them are pastes. In the first it is easiest to tell with the legs and feet.

Obviously Finžgar's origins from the noble Vilhar family would be problematic if their goal was to address ordinary Slovenian people and their national pride through him. Miroslav's son Fran Serafin Vilhar Kalski was married to Marija Hajek whom he met in Prague (perhaps she was from the noble family von Hayek of the famous economist Friederich von Hayek?), but we can only find little information about him and his family. We can only guess whether Marija was Finžgar's real mother, but it is possible, since Fran Serafin married her about the time of Finžgar's birth. Also, on the list of guests shown above the name Marija is written next to the inscription "Mati" (mother) and the name "Terez." (according to the official story, Finžgar's mother was named Terezija). This list is probably also a fake, but maybe they added some truth to it as a joke?

In any case, when listening to Finžgar's speech, I found out that it is rather unusual and most definitely not an accent of the region of his official birthplace. While he did speak pretty well, he did pronounce certain words in such a strange way that it seems possible Slovene was not his primary language. Who knows if he really wrote all the stuff that he is said to have written?

I came across another interesting fact while investigating the Vilhar family. A few years ago, the late major general Marijan F. Kranjc [revealed the fact](#) that at least two members of the Vilhar family – Nikola and Stanislav Vilhar – were important secret service agents at the time. In the documents revealed, we see these people connected with minister at the time Izidor Cankar, a very influential figure and Finžgar's close friend. People that read Miles' work should already know what such a family connection to secret services means.

Given I have just mentioned Izidor Cankar, let's take a look at another photo of Finžgar with Izidor and his even more famous cousin Ivan Cankar (said to be Slovenia's greatest writer of all time):



Izidor Cankar is standing on the left, his cousin Ivan Cankar on the right and the person in the back is the famous actor and director Anton (Tone) Verovšek. What's wrong with this photo? Izidor's head was likely pasted in the photo, since the shadows on his face are different from the shadows on other faces.

But the photo reveals something else interesting, namely the unusual similarity between Anton Verovšek and Izidor Cankar. The similarity is confirmed further when looking at other photos:



Given the similarity (they were both extremely tall as well) we may suspect Izidor and Anton were somehow related. The story of Izidor Cankar's younger days is very hard to believe, reminding of a badly written movie script. His father Andrej Cankar supposedly married into an "extremely wealthy" German family living in Serbia; his wife's maiden name was Huber and they were living in a town called Šid (pronounced similarly to "Žid", meaning "Jew" in these areas, the town had a substantial Jewish population). But Andrej, together with another son-in-law and father-in-law, both also called Andrej, played cards for three days and three nights and gambled away the whole family's wealth. Izidor was the lucky child, because only he could go and live with his wealthy grandmother and aunt; the other six children went on to live in misery with their father and mother. Their mother later got a "psychosomatic" illness that prevented her from walking, so she spent 13 years lying in bed, but then miraculously, right after their father died and the children came home from the funeral, got up and could walk again. You have to admit that it would be hard to think of a more unbelievable story.

With this in mind it is not unreasonable to ask – could Anton Verovšek be the real father of Izidor Cankar? We get no explanation for what he is doing with Fran and Izidor in the photo above. It is also strange to see Anton's note and signature on the cover of the newest biography of Izidor

Cankar. But online one can find several letters that Anton sent to Izidor and they reveal to us that these two were very close indeed. In one of the letters Anton wrote the following to Izidor: “You have no idea how I miss you! It’s a shame, such a shame that you are not here ... Heartfelt greetings from your old man – Tone.” His old man? Okay, I guess the story of Izidor’s past perhaps really is just ... a story.

Let’s look at another photo of Finžgar with Izidor Cankar (probably also faked since Izidor was extremely tall and therefore likely much taller than Finžgar):



Hmm, what are their hands doing under their vests? Are they signalling that they belong to the upper class or that they are Jewish, or both? **Phoenicians, so both**. In biographies of both Finžgar and the extended Cankar family one can find references to a town in Austria called **Judenburg**, and a strange “coincidence” that most males in these families were supposedly tailors. Besides this being a traditional Jewish occupation according to Miles, perhaps they were “tailors” also in the sense of “having the scissors and canvas in their hands”, meaning that they were influential leaders?

We get a confirmation of this when we take a look at Finžgar's medals/decorations which he received for his work (there is that King's Cross of the Order of St. Sava again, lined with two-headed eagles, etc.). In this respect he seems even more similar to Fran Serafin Vilhar's photo above, with all of his decorations.



We can find another serious anomaly regarding Finžgar's official story. Janez Bogataj, a famous ethnologist and co-author of Finžgar's new biography, claims that his mother, Zdravka Sokli (married Bogataj), was Finžgar's niece. But such family ties are impossible according to the official story, since Finžgar did not have a sister and his brother is said to have had no children. And in any case, we now know that this story is untrue.

However, we can see a woman named Anica Finžgar on numerous photos in the new biography. She is said to have been Fran's cousin and housekeeper who lived with him his whole adult life, and she accompanied him even on holidays. They are often pictured together with Zdravka and her children. Zdravka and her children are said to have lived together with Anica and Fran for at least 15 years, supposedly taking care of the elderly relatives. So given how fake Finžgar's history is and how unusual it would be for someone to spend their whole adult life living with his cousin, we think the following scenario is likely: Anica was Finžgar's partner/wife, Zdravka was their daughter and Janez Bogataj is their grandson (we can definitely notice a similarity between Anica and Zdravka, see photo below). Anica could even have been Fran's partner and cousin at the same time, since marriage between cousins was not unusual among nobility. Obviously this could not be admitted to the public since Fran was also playing a role of a priest.

Pictured below are Anica and Fran with Zdravka and her children:



We get one final clue that Janez Bogataj (and by the same token also his relative Finžgar) is indeed connected to the Vilhars. When searching online for castle Kalec, I noticed that [many old pictures of this castle](#) are being supplied from “Janez Bogataj’s archive”. Why would Bogataj have these pictures if not due to him being descended from the castle’s inhabitants? It’s not like he has a special interest in castles; it’s just this one castle that can be found under a search for “Janez Bogataj’s archive”.

To sum up, the ruling classes could significantly influence the opinion of the people with the help of literati and other important cultural figures. Through the written and spoken word, they presented their plans in a good light and gained followers. In the case of Finžgar, this plan could be to unite South Slavic nations into a common state, which did in fact happen soon with Yugoslavia. Perhaps they also wanted to ignite the nationalistic sentiment that benefited the war industry. Finžgar as a priest was very liberal and did things that were not aligned with the views of the Church. For example, even the official story says that he fathered an illegitimate child soon after beginning his priesthood (the identity of the child is not known), and in general he doesn’t appear a very holy man from his biographies, which often sound about as artificial as his photos. So perhaps his task was also to reform and loosen the grip of the Church.

Given that Finžgar's story is fake, the stories of Slovenia's two greatest literati of all time, writer Ivan Cankar and poet France Prešeren, should also be immediately suspicious, as these two guys both seem closely linked to Finžgar and his associates. And indeed, many anomalies can be spotted even at just a short glance at the two. But that is more work to be done at another time.